DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 233 369 CS 207 785

AUTHOR Clinton, DeWitt
TITLE A Writer's Suggestions for Teaching Creative Writing.
PUB DATE 5 Mar 83
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented, in part, at the Annual Convention of the Wisconson Council of Teachers of English (25th, Oconomowoc, WI, March 4-5, 1983).
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Techniques; Creative Activities; *Creative Writing; Elementary Secondary Education; *Poetry; *Student Motivation; Writing Exercises; Writing Improvement; *Writing Instruction

ABSTRACT

Inventive activities in the creative writing classroom can generate a great deal of excitement for the writing of poetry. Such activities might begin with improvising ways in which poetry can be written in alternative media, such as haiku on clay tablets that can be glazed and fired, then macramed together into wind chimes. Another activity, following a reading and dramatization of "Spoon River Anthology," is taking gravestone rubbings at a local cemetery and inventing dramatic monologues in the style of Edgar Lee Masters. Other suggested activities include (1) studying and listening to ballads, followed by writing, practice, and performance; (2) starting a column of poetry in the school or town newspaper, offering original works and reviews; (3) visiting the local art museum or gallery, preceded by a review of poems based on various paintings, and followed by art-inspired student writing; (4) building library skills by reporting on a modern or contemporary poet; (5) introducing works by the masters and having students tinker with the form; (6) bringing a poet into the classroom so students can talk with someone who writes poetry as part of his or her life; (7) publishing a modestly produced journal in which students contribute poetry and prose as well as editorial and production time; and (8) producing and directing an annual poetry festival, featuring dramatic performances of "Spoon River" poems, epics, ballads, and favorite poems, or displaying poems alongside student photographs, or photographs of major artworks. (HTH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED233369

A WRITER'S SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING CREATIVE WRITING

DeWitt Clinton

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

DeWitt Clinton

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS 207785

A WRITER'S SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING CREATIVE WRITING*

DeWitt Clinton
UW-Whitewater

Searching for alternatives to the cinquain, or limerick, or love-sick poetry of your junior or senior high school creative writing class? I, too, would despair of teaching poetry at these levels if the possibilities for creativity remained in the same sing-song atmosphere year after year after year. Though poetry may be closest to our own hearts as adult readers, it becomes an entirely different challenge to teach creative writing classes, hoping that students might enjoy, after the lessons, even a fraction of shared interest of poetry that you have as an adult.

Where do we get our ideas about what to teach in our poetry workshops? As a poet who has worked with several state arts councils in the Poetry-in-the-Schools Project, I find that teachers, for the most part, remember what they were taught in their college courses. Remarkably, I also find that a number of teachers didn't even enjoy poetry, as a subject, in college. Or that they found it "difficult" or "puzzling." So often what happens in the process of moving from student to teacher of poetry is that the subject is reduced to its simpliest (and easiest) forms. And, if these simple

*This article was presented, in part, at the 25th Annual Convention of the W.C.T.E., March 5, 1983, Oconomowoc.

forms (the couplet, the tanka or cinquain, or the haiku--or other variations) are easily mastered, the instructor is often left with that other notion, often misunderstood, or even abused, that poetry is feelings. Three weeks of love sick rhymed "I love you's" will quickly, and usually, make the teacher wonder what was so special and unique about poetry in the first place.

I teach invention in creative writing classes and I find more excitement for writing poetry this way than for all the short Japanese/Chinese or teenage heart throb poems you can read from now till ... What is invention? It calls for, most of all, throwing away (or setting aside) all the textbooks/guidebooks on how to teach poetry and learning how to rely on your own personal, excited interest in poetry. If personal excitement is not part of you, after the schoolbooks are set aside--then perhaps you will want to consider a return visit to the area college or university creative writing class to see what happened to that interest of long ago. But with that personal excitement, invention will allow your students to grow at remarkable speed in their appreciation of the great range of poetic experiments.

Over the last few years, I have prepared a series of activities that could, in many situations, last for the entire school year. So if you're looking for new strategies in teaching creative writing workshops, you might want to consider the following suggestions:

MEDIA ARTS

Begin to improvise ways in which poetry can be written in alternative mediums. My favorite is the FIRED CLAY MACRAME BELL SCULPTURE. With assistance from the local art instructor, help

your students shape one pound balls of clay into 8" plaques, placing pencil holes in the top and bottom. Using any other tool other than a pencil, have students experiment with (back to the short haiku--but from a refreshing angle, I believe) short poetic forms. They can cut into, or build up letters on the clay. After green firing, glazing and final firing, have the students gather their plaques and macrame the pieces together with other objects (wood, sheafs of grain, colored yarn, etc.) so that all hang at different angles. Hang near an open window. You'll be surprised not only of the poetry, but of the poetry-haiku-wind chimes. This exercise, lasting two to three weeks, gets the class off to a good start.

Variations: on butcher paper, have students try to account for how animals are the way they are, creating "Just So" stories somewhat like Rudyard Kipling's stories. With magic markers for "set design" and patience in lettering, the students can practice their own "creation stories" which is an easy lead-in to a more formal discussion of myth, legends and tales. By now both you and your students should be looking forward to your own inventive ideas of how to make creative writing both enjoyable and productive in unique ways.

LOCAL HISTORY IN NARRATIVE VERSE

Following a reading, outloud and dramatized, of Edgar Lee Masters' Spoon River Anthology, take your students to a nearby cemetery. Have them take grave rubbings and invent a dramatic monologue from that grave, preferably someone not in the family. After the rubbings and poems, have the students collect the work into a modestly produced mimeographed "Spoon River" with every-

one contributing on the production end. This certainly will measure your students' interest in a larger creative writing journal produced in the last few weeks of the second semester. In addition to Spoon River poems, I would suggest a few weeks with epics you may be familar with, and in turn, showing how your creative writing class can conceive and write their own contemporary epics, including fantasy epics, or parodies of the old ones.

LIMITLESS POSSIBILITIES OF INVENTION

By now you're getting the feel for invention. Rather than go into exact detail--here are several more experiences for you and your class.

1. A week of ballads--to study and listen to--and a follow-up week of writing, practice and performance. I wouldn't suggest electric guitars and rock & roll unless you are the hearty type.

2. Start a column of poetry in either the school or town newspaper. Offer both opinion, or review, of new books of poetry (or old) as well as space for creative poetry or prose. And get promises from the newspaper editor that you can keep that space for the school year!

3. Visit the local art museum or gallery. Before going, share with your class all the poems based on paintings. I can think this minute of poems by W.H. Auden and W.C. Williams. The art museum is a great place to write where the students are asked to compose short scenes, or poetry, of what they see. (Excellent for descriptive writing skills!)

4. Every third week or so, ask that three students report on a modern or contemporary poet--from Poe to Dickinson to Frost to any contemporary poet with publications in your library. The report will build your students' library skills and will provide a constant, steady background of major poets throughout the school year. Be sure the students read, dramatize and discuss the selected poems.

5. Tinker with the Masters. By now it's alright to introduce your favorite poems, for the students have a flavor of what poets "do." Here you can even introduce sonnets and odes--depending on how well you and your students are prepared for the traditional forms. Remember that seriousness of the subject can often be just as healthy a learning experience with outright laughter of the form--provided that produces better results than imitation.

6. Adopt a poet. Either through the Wisconsin Arts Board (123 W. Washington Ave., Madison 53702) or your own resources, bring in a live poet so that you and your students can talk with someone on the outside who writes poetry as part of their lives. Check your local writers guild if you have a limited budget. I'm sure someone could visit once a month throughout the year--looking at your students' work (and yours!) and offering helpful suggestions. Also--get their opinion of new books of poetry for your library--which brings up the second part of this adoption--the sponsor. One parent might be able (might even want to!) to finance your extra expenses, but especially, a parent could help with perhaps $20 a year for new book purchases.

7. Ready to publish? As the volume of poetry and prose grows, consider publishing a modestly produced journal in which every student not only contributes material but editorial time as well (typists, designers, editors, artists, assemblers). Copies should go to your principal, the surrounding libraries and even (if you care to explore it) area and national poetry contests, which can be learned about in Writer's Digest or similar publications.

8. And a final performance... There are Rose Bowls and World Series and soon your school will expect its annual Poetry Festival in May, produced and directed by your creative writing class. Use the stage for dramatic performances of "Spoon River" poems, of epics, ballads and well-known and favorite poems; set up poems alongside photographs of paintings; hang poster legends (or Just So stories) and clay poems and even invite local or area poets to read from their work.

Finally, if you have made it through this year with just a few of these suggestions, I'm sure you will feel much more invigorated about the new year's creative writing class. You'll know what works well for your own situations and very likely, you will be inventing your own ideas about how to create exciting and challenging experiments in creative writing.

#